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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE,

AT ITS

TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING,

HELD IN

BOSTON, NOVEMBER 11, 1891.

BY

GEORGE S. ALLAN, D.D.S.,
of New York.



BOSTON:

PRESS OF ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL.

1892.

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248 BOYLSTON ST., BOSTON, NOV. 16, 1891.

GEORGE S. ALLAN, D.D.S., 51 West 37th St., New York:

MY DEAR DOCTOR: I have the pleasure to inform you that at the twenty-fourth annual meeting of the American Academy of Dental Science, held in Boston, Nov. 11, 1891, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of the Academy be presented to Dr. Allan for his very able and instructive address, and that a copy be requested for publication and for preservation among the records of the Academy.

Sincerely hoping that you will comply with this request,

I am very truly yours,

E. N. HARRIS,

Corresponding Secretary.

51 WEST 37TH ST., NEW YORK, FEB. 8, 1892.

MY DEAR DOCTOR: Permit me to reply to your kind note of November 16, and acknowledge the compliment contained therein, and to thank your society for their over-appreciation of my efforts in their behalf, as well as for their pleasant way of showing the same.

I trust the Academy will forgive me for my long delay in forwarding my address for publication. I hoped to have revised and rewritten it, but have been forced to give up the idea by the pressure of other duties and none too much strength.

The subject I had the honor of presenting to you ought to have been handled by abler hands than mine, for it appears to me that the future welfare of our calling depends much on the way in which they may receive and act upon it. Of course, all I claim is to have turned a side-light on a subject with which we are all only too familiar.

In the hope that good may come from it, I cheerfully accede to your request for a copy of my address for publication, and herewith transmit a copy for that purpose.

Thanking you personally for your kindness and forbearance, and with best wishes for the continued prosperity and usefulness of the American Academy of Dental Science,

I am very truly yours,

GEO. S. ALLAN.

DR. E. N. HARRIS, *Corresponding Secretary American Academy Dental Science.*

ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Gentlemen, of the American Academy of Dental Science:—

In responding to the kind invitation to be present with you this evening and take a part in your annual festivities, I wish first to congratulate you on the many evidences of strong vitality and growth I see in your society; and, second, to thank you for the compliment you have extended to me. Boston has treated me so kindly and well these many years that I feel much at home with you, and rejoice at the opportunity, under such pleasant auspices, of again meeting so many old friends and in the hope of making some new ones.

But it has been a puzzle to know what to write about. Though this is a dental meeting, the conditions are such as not to warrant a purely dental subject. You have thrown off your yoke in coming here this evening, and, like school-boys on a lark, expect to be entertained, or at least, want to be. But I cannot tell stories even moderately well, and never could crack a joke. Hence my dilemma.

But it occurred to me I might take a middle course, or rather a side issue, and set you thinking on one of the topics of the day and its bearings on our specialty, and so win my way to your good graces and my dinner at the same time. This I will try to do. Bear with me patiently, and remember this is something of a maiden effort in this direction.

In the current literature of the day, magazines, newspapers, etc., to say nothing about the more weighty matter found in book form, nothing is more common than to see allusions to the doctrine of evolution, and they are mostly in a way to indicate that the reading and thinking public are more or less familiar with its meaning; in fact, have incorporated it with their every-day knowledge of facts and principles. In ordinary conversation, the technical terms pertaining to the doctrine are frequent and well understood.

In truth, a vast literature on the subject has sprung up in these modern days, and it is constantly increasing in volume and power. The meaning of it all is that a great law of nature has been brought to light and is rapidly being unfolded to the vision of all, and that it is so far-reaching in its applications and reveals so many of the hitherto considered secrets of nature, telling us not only of the how of things, but of the necessity that has always existed that things must be done in just such a manner, that it looks as if we had at last grasped a great fundamental law of the universe, one that was in force from the beginning, and that if any law could be said to have antedated another law, this was the one that was first set in motion. There is no question but that it has taken a tremendous hold of the human intellect, that men think of it constantly, and use it more and more frequently in their efforts to solve the secrets of the world's progress and growth; and it is certain their judgment as to its value has not been misplaced, and so it comes about that men, women, and children think and talk of evolution.

This is neither the time nor place to go into any extended analysis of the doctrine in general. That many imperfectly understand its significance and misinterpret its meaning is true enough; but this holds true of the first attempts to outline all newly discovered laws or truths. Time and thought, as a rule, correct all such errors. The law has come to stay, and so universally has it been accepted, and so completely has it overcome opposition, that one now hears but little said against it. The wonder is that it has obtained so strong a footing in so short a time. No other great law or theory can claim so much.

But I must come to my text and its application, and will take a short cut. Applying this doctrine to man, the statement is made that he is a resultant of two factors², powers, or agencies, — no one term quite fills the bill, — viz., heredity and environment; and, the more one turns this presentation of the case over in his mind, the more strongly does its truth appeal to his judgment and reason. One curious phase of the few criticisms that have been made against it is the willingness of its opponents to concede its application in the case of domestic animals and plants, denying, at the same time, its force when applied to the human race. I never appreciated the comical side of this position so much as I did once when I told a lady that, as a matter of fact, she was an animal. She indignantly denied my assertion, and took great offence. I do not look, though, for any of you to question the statement.

In order, however, to give point to my final argument, you will permit me, in an illustration or so, to point out the drift of my thoughts.

First let me say that the law holds good for all the parts that go to make the individual. Mental, moral, and physical traits, — all are subject to its controlling power.

A man born with a tendency to consumption is commonly considered a fated man. His days are said to be numbered, and his friends and relations have much compassion for him. But science says no. He may yet live his full number of days if he will use good judgment and change his living-place and habits, and do it in time ; for it is certain that unless he exposes himself to the contagion of consumption, and takes into his system the specific germ that induces the disease, he will escape and live as others did. He has not inherited the disease itself, only a condition of the system which makes him susceptible to it. Somehow, in a way we cannot explain, the bacillus tuberculosis finds a proper and good soil, and flourishes in the lungs and other organs of some, whereas it would die outright or be smothered in another's. So he must change his environments and go where the germ is not found, and where the conditions of life are such as to strengthen the system in its natural efforts to overcome its effects, and destroy them in case any have obtained a lodgement in his system. So the man changes his environments and lives his natural length of days. But, if this is a true statement, so also is the opposite, viz.: Place a non-susceptible person in an atmosphere charged with tuberculous germs and let him breathe it constantly, and, sooner or later, they will take root and flourish. They will not only do this, but they will make a suitable soil and transmit this latter to their descendants.

But the law holds as good for moral and mental conditions and attributes. Place the intellectual man where he can neither meet those who will stimulate his mental faculties, obtain free access to books, or have the time and opportunity for thought, and his powers will soon begin to fail ; and likewise the man of low intelligence and poor mental capacities taken from his ancestors, if placed where such as he has will be stimulated to new growth — cultivated, in fact — may be made to develop wonderfully, and a new and better man made to grow out of the old one, and he will transmit to his descendants the newly acquired and better tendencies. The truth is the law is a fundamental law of life and matter — is all-powerful and constantly operative. Man by his will-power and reason can modify its action, diminish or increase its power, but cannot change its nature ;

and just here it is that man's supremacy over all other created things is most apparent.

Man can regulate, change, or alter his surroundings, and with them change his course and destiny, and — what is of even greater importance — change the destiny and course of his descendants. To know how true this last statement is, turn to your books or inquire of those who have made it a study, and find the answer as to how hereditary traits and characteristics are developed and become fixed, and as to their all-powerful influence on the individual. If any of you have not thought of this, or thought of it but little, I would most earnestly commend the subject to you. Nothing is more powerful than this same heredity, whether it be physical, mental, or moral in its nature ; nothing more marvellous than the manner in which it is acquired, grows, and maintains its influence. A physician once said to me, "It is hard to kill a man who comes from a long-lived race," and he spoke the truth ; and just as true is it that as a rule the man of strong mental grasp and power, and the man whose moral instincts are a gift from his parents' blood, will fight gallantly against adverse conditions, and will be an intellectual or a moral man, or both, to the end. Well may we believe, then, that heredity and environments are the twin-brothers that rule, for weal or for woe, the destinies of all.

But what has all this to do with our specialty of dentistry? Let us see. But first let me say that the law is cumulative in its action, and applies with equal power to masses and numbers when viewed as units.

Whence comes dentistry, and where was its birthplace? I do not know. Some might say that it came from nowhere and never was born, but, like Topsy, it "grew" only. But I think differently. Ideas, principles, and laws may be said to have always existed, and wait only on discovery to reveal themselves ; but their transmutation into callings for man's edification, growth, or enjoyment is another affair. Necessity has truly been said to be the mother of invention, but what is invention but a controlling and directing of matter and law into new channels and for new purposes? Every invention is a new birth, and so is every calling, only they do not come into life so suddenly. The time element has far more to do with them. They come, as the rivers and streams come, from little beginnings, and from sources far distant and far separated from one another. Dentistry may be said to have been born of human distress and pain, and conceived by human intelligence and ingenuity. The new-born, for many years and ages, was insignificant in size and appearance, and attracted no attention —

so little that its presence among us passed unnoticed, and we have only known that it lived since it arrived at maturity. A like statement can be made of medicine in general, but I doubt if any of you can much extend the list.

Without going into the question of the relations of dentistry to medicine in general in any detailed manner, it may not be amiss to emphasize the above statement of their common origin and heritage, and show how, in the nature of things, it could not be otherwise. I am one of those who believe in claiming everything for my profession that belongs to it, and see no reason why I should abate my demands in the slightest on any sentimental considerations. But, to be frank, most of this discussion as to our proper position has seemed to me to be very foolish and absurd. It is totally uncalled-for and unwarranted by the facts as we find them. In a late periodical I find this quotation from a speech by Professor W. D. Miller, of Berlin: "At the same time, physicians as well as dentists recognize the fact that medicine rests upon common ground with dentistry, and it would be as impossible to separate medicine from dentistry as to separate the human mouth from the alimentary tract." This is a statement the strength and truth of which few of you, I think, will care to question.

My belief is that the heredity — parentage — argument is, in itself, unanswerable. Applying this argument to the two professions, calling them two simply for the sake of argument, and we find that they differ simply in degree and in degree only. A part of the body fails in some way to do its work. It shows weakness or eccentricity in its character or action, and straightway man sets to work to discover the cause and apply a remedy. Grouping all these abnormal conditions and their treatment together, and we have the science of medicine. Separating any one part from the whole, and we have a specialty. It is probably true that all specialties have had an independent origin. The practice of surgery and that of the oculist certainly did, but as they grew they sought and found their common home. The same is true of dentistry; but if it has failed to seek its fountain-head and drink freely of its waters, it is because of errors in judgment and comprehension on the part of those who practise it, or more likely because it is bulky and so largely dependent on the mechanic arts. The dental materia medica is, indeed, limited, but not more so than it is in the practice of the orthopedist or the oculist. By the term bulky I mean the number of those engaged in its practice.

But the point I wish to impress on your minds, which I desire you to

take home with you and think over, and which really was the impelling motive that prompted me to appear before you, remains to be presented. The two cardinal doctrines of the theory of evolution as it relates to life I stated to you as being those of heredity and environments. They indeed do not cover the whole ground, but they alone are the ones I wish, in my short time, to refer to. Heredity I have touched upon: now I would do the same as regards environments.

Individuals, classes, nations, are beset by, controlled, fashioned, by their environments. The law is far-reaching in its effects, and holds in its grasp the destinies of all. Few there are who rightly measure its power and influence. It takes each one of you gentlemen in hand, and moulds and fashions you as a potter does his clay, but it works so quietly and gradually that you are mostly off your guard, and forget your power and duty in controlling your own destinies by changing and directing your personal environments. Will-power and strength of character it is that can do this, controlled and guided by moral and intellectual aims and ambitions; and sad indeed is the thought how largely these factors are hereditary in their nature.

But as I said just now in regard to this law, that which holds good of individuals holds equally good when applied to aggregations of individuals, such as those which go to make up callings or communities; and hence it is that we, as dentists, a class or body of men having a common path and purpose in life, are called on to study this law, to examine its bearings on our professional life and position, and see what we can do as a class to better our common lot. Our heredity we cannot change: our environments we may and ought to.

It seems quite probable to me that were it not for the fact that the dear public call us doctors, natural instinct and common sense classifying us as such, we occupying a negative rather than a positive position, it would be difficult to give us a local habitation and place of rest amongst the world's workers. We have some of the characteristics of a profession, some of the artisan, and we take kindly to the tradesman and his ways, and altogether we make up a curious compound—so curious that the individual, following his tastes and inclinations, if he has the ability can locate himself almost where he will, and he will still be recognized as one of us and as being in good standing; and most unfortunate is it that individual preferences and tastes control to a great extent. As the stream will not rise higher than its source, so it is that the calling will not demand

a place higher than the tastes and ambitions of the units that compose it. Many there are who wish to occupy a more commanding and assured position, but are held back by the traditions, the teachings, and the "*vis inertiae*" of the mass to which they belong. But I firmly believe that the dawn of a better day is at hand, and that the force of circumstances alone will drive us to assert ourselves when other and more natural means may fail. Like the streams from the same fountain-head, the greater and the lesser, when united in a common bed, will flow together and mingle their waters in a common whole. We cannot take a course side by side with the mother-stream of medicine and keep ourselves afloat, and so, willy-nilly, we must follow our destiny.

But some will say that, if this must be, why trouble ourselves about the matter? Why not close our eyes and let the stream carry us wheresoever it will? We are bound to come out right, anyway. So I would say, were it not for one thing. The streams are not yet united, and are kept from so doing by artificial restraints and obstructions, and a constant effort is being made by well-intentioned men to force our little stream to one side and mark out for it an independent course and channel. Time, under the controlling power of natural law, will surely, in the end, prevent this, but long delays may ensue, and the proper growth and dignity of our calling suffer thereby; so it is wise for us to study the situation, and see if we cannot hasten the day when our position will be assured, and our title cease to convey a false impression.

Hence it is that I bring forcibly to your notice, and would compel your attention to, the power of environments in shaping our destiny, and of our ability to order them for our common good.

Just here it would seem as though I might close and let the suggestion alone, working on your minds, do its work, so clearly and distinctly must it point out the path we should pursue. What we want to be we surely can be, and only our own obstinacy and perverseness can delay the full fruition of our desires.

But I will complete my picture, taking it for granted that none of you want to occupy a lower position among the occupations of the world than is necessary, any more than you would willingly take a lower social one, and that you all know that the two positions are mutually related to, and dependent in a great measure on, each other. I will tell you, in as few words as possible, what I think we ought to do, and do at once and with all our might. *We must seek for, and rest not till we obtain,*

recognition as being doctors ; and to do that we must be doctors not only in name, but in fact. The diploma must tell no lie, and should not convey a partial truth.

The environments we should seek, then, are those which stand ready at hand ; and there is no danger of our seeking in vain. The community will not estimate us beyond our own valuation. We should, then, place our valuation high, and go where we belong. The community just now, I fancy, only gives us the title of doctors. They do not think of us as being genuine except in part, and communities generally estimate men and callings about right.

The degree of M.D. — and how funny that of D.D.S. or M.D.S. sounds in the light of facts and our desires !— means a great deal. Maybe it means too much for us, and that there is the trouble, or one trouble ; but it does not mean more than it ought to. It means, first, a liberal education ; it means that money-making is secondary to the calls of humanity, and that the laws that govern barter and sale, though legally just, are professionally wrong, in that they make property rights of the means of prolonging life and alleviating human suffering. In these respects its code of ethics is superior to those under which the merchant or artisan pursues his calling. The true physician does not sell things, but knowledge, skill, and judgment.

It has been said that if a man cannot harvest the fruits of invention he will not invent, but will give his time and attention to more lucrative work. The history of medicine and surgery, however, disproves this. No class of men in the world invent more than doctors. Their ambition to excel and make a name is great, and they get their reward for what they do in increased reputation and honor. They also get their reward in dollars and cents, too ; for the one produces the other.

It is worth noting that those who take the non-professional or art view of our specialty would, in a great measure, discard a code of ethics entirely — “*Facilis descensus Averni.*” They would not only accept the right to patent and permit the dentists to derive a profit from patents, but would open wide the doors to the trade spirit and grant the privilege to advertise at will, and so break down all the barriers that lie between the doctor and the merchant, or artisan. All the arguments used for the one might apply very equally to all. It is well to keep in mind the true meaning of the non-professional idea and its sequences.

Sitting in a corner one evening at a dental meeting, I asked myself the

question, How many of those present make anything, or want to make anything, out of patients? I could not single out one; and to the credit and glory of our calling the number is few indeed, and daily diminishing, of those who would add to their income in this questionable manner. The many, though, hear the cry of the few, but have not the courage to cast them out.

I hold, then, that the degrees of D.D.S. or M.D.S. are misleading and obstructive. The dentist should be an M.D. His studies and training should be the same. Only in this way can he obtain a title clear and unquestioned, and take his proper place amongst the world's workers. Only in this way can he attain his just ambitions and longings.

We know our heredity. What are our environments? If we are true to ourselves and true to our profession, we shall seek in the higher and purer atmosphere just within our reach, a home and a life fitted to make us bigger and better men, and our brothers and the public will extend to us a hearty welcome.

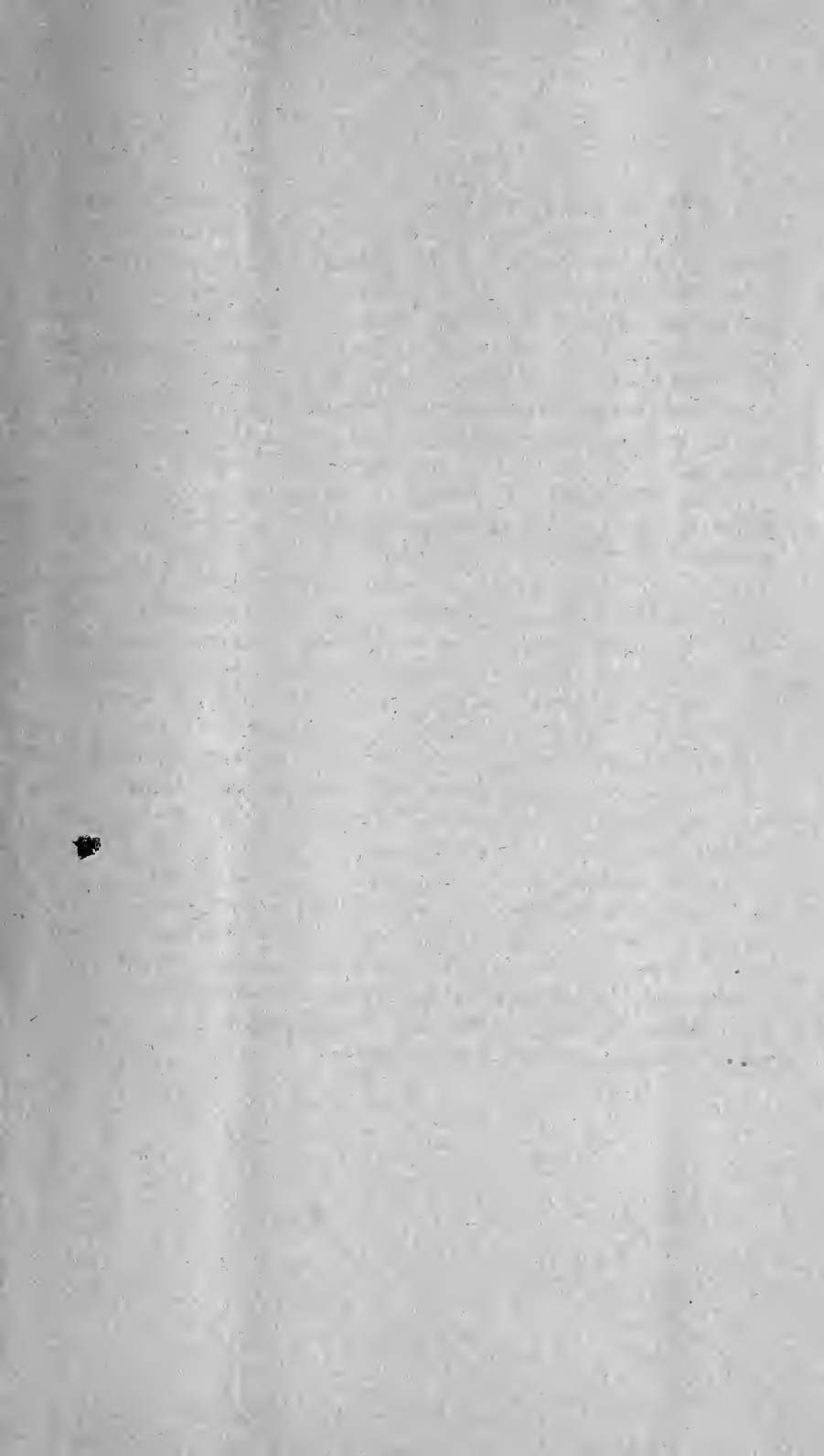
It may be advisable to say a word or so in relation to the proper method to adopt to carry out the suggestions incorporated in this paper; for I would not have you think that this most important part of my subject had been overlooked, or that I had deemed it of less importance than the idea itself. This is a practical age, and the man who is wholly visionary must take a back seat, and let other and more wide-awake men take charge of the car of progress. If, however, we can couple the vision of the future with the movement of the day, our time will not have been wasted.

Holding fully as I do to the statement of fact that dentistry is simply a specialty of medicine and cannot be divorced from it, and that in no case can the part be made greater than the whole, but that the more closely the part is cemented to or incorporated into the body of the whole, so much greater will be its strength and power, for it must take both from the parent body, — I see just as plainly as any of you the peculiar conditions with which we are surrounded, and which would seem to imply that we might, could, would, or ought to be a body separate and distinct by ourselves. I see, as you do, that we need a special and distinct training, that a large or exhaustive study of anatomy, physiology, or therapeutics is not needed to prepare the dentist for his work, and prepare him fairly well too. I know that our work is largely mechanical, demanding a knowledge of instruments, and tools, and the artisan's skill and touch, and that so

great is the demand for our services that in numbers we approximate, if we do not equal, those who devote themselves to the general practice of medicine. I know and see all this, and give them all due weight ; but I say, when all is granted and all summed up and allowed, the essential fact remains unaltered, unaffected, and just as immovable as ever. Our specialty is a specialty only, and our best good demands that we take our proper position in the body we belong to.

But I must hasten to a close and answer the questions, How are our special wants to be met when the D.D.S., the D.M.D., etc., are dropped and the simple M.D. takes their place? How are we to avoid taking in study and preparation the great mass the doctor needs and we do not need? and, further, how are we to obtain the special training that our calling demands and must have to fit us for the life before us?

It is manifestly unreasonable to ask the student preparing to practise as a dentist to take a full course in medicine and then a special one in dentistry. Few indeed could devote either the money or the time to carry out such a plan, and most of those who could would object on the ground that it was not necessary ; and I fully believe that such a plan never could be carried out. What can be done, and successfully too, is this : Let the dental student take so much of the essential and rudimentary medical course as may be requisite, and later on take his special course. In all our great universities this plan and principle is adopted, and the student is thus enabled to fit himself for his special work and obtain full value received for the time given to fitting himself for his life's work. At some place half-way or thereabout the course of study becomes elective, and the student is permitted to select his studies with special reference to his future life, or rather choose that line of studies that has been marked out for that purpose. I am satisfied that few objections of value or weight can be urged against the plan, and that our medical brothers stand ready and willing to extend a helping hand in carrying it out.



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